



Al-Risala 1984

September

Editorial

In April 1984 India's first cosmonaut, Rakesh Sharma, journeyed into space along with two Russians. A few days later, according to the *Times of India* (April 20, 1984), the flight came in for discussion, 4 among an Indian family, with every member of the family expressing his or her opinion on the subject.

"Dad," the narrator's youngest daughter asked. "Can I become the first spacewoman?"

"Yes dear," replied her grandmother. "You will be the first Indian spacewoman. I will consult Pandit Girdhar Vyas and see what is in store in your kundali (horoscope)."

"GRANNY," the girl's brothers Arun, interjected. "You should consult the Russian leaders, not astrologers."

From this story we can gauge the difference between ancient and modern times. What the grandmother said represented ancient thinking, whereas the boy's reply was representative of modern tone of thought.

In ancient times knowledge was a set of analogies compiled by the likes of astrologers and soothsayers. In modern times, however, only realities discovered through observation and experiment can be said to constitute knowledge. Ancient man thought that events sprung from mysterious causes; but modern man knows that there is a definite cause for whatever happens in the world. An educated youth of today realizes that it is scientists who know about space-travel, not fortune tellers, and it is to scientists that he will turn for knowledge of that subject.

Man's mode of thought, then, has been completely transformed in modern times. In presenting Islam before modern Man, it is essential that one pays full regard to this transformation. Islam is an entirely scientific religion, but those who preach Islam also have to be scientific in their outlook and mode of presentation. If, like Arun's grandmother, they can only put Islam forward in unscientific terms, then there is a danger of the blame that they themselves should shoulder, being laid at the door of Islam itself.

Da'awah Power

When the Prophet of Islam was in Medina, these verses of the Quran were revealed:

Apostle, proclaim what has been revealed to you by your Lord, if you do not, you will surely fail to convey His message. God will protect you from all men.

(Maida, V 67).

In this verse the condition which the Muslims must fulfill in order to be eligible for God's succour is laid down as communication of the word of God. Since it was revealed history has repeatedly substantiated the truth of this fact. The invasion of Muslims' territory by the Mongol hordes of Genghis Khan and Hulagu provides one such case.

In the words of the contemporary historian Ibn Athir, "If one were to say that such a calamity has not occurred since the creation of Adam until the present day, it would not be an exaggeration." The Muslims were helpless before the savage might of these merciless carriers. It was the power of the spiritual message of Islam that finally saved Islam from extinction. Here are two quotations from works by western historians:

Although in after years this great empire was split up and the political power of Islam diminished, still its spiritual conquests went on uninterruptedly when the Mongol hordes sacked Baghdad (AD 1258) and drowned in blood the faded glory of the Abbasid dynasty, Islam had just gained a foothold in the island of Sumatra and was just about to commence its triumphant progress through the islands of the Malay Archipelago. In the hours of its political degradation, Islam has achieved some of its most brilliant spiritual conquests: on two great historical occasions, infidel barbarians have set their feet on the necks of the followers of the Prophet – the Saljuq Turks in the eleventh and the Mongols in the thirteenth century and in each case the conquerors have accepted the religion of the conquered.

T.W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, p.2.

Hard pressed between the mounted archers of the wild Mongols in the East and the mailed knights of the Crusaders in the west, Islam in the early part of the 13th century seemed forever lost. How different was the situation in the last part of the same century. The last crusader had by that time been driven into the sea, the seventh of the Il-Khans, many of whom had been flirting with Christianity, had finally recognized Islam as the state religion – a dazzling victory for the faith of Mohammad. Just as in the case of the Seljuks, the religion of the Muslims had conquered where their arms had failed. Less than half a century after Hulagu's merciless attempt at the destruction of Islamic culture, his great-grandson Ghazan, as a devout Muslim, was consecrating much time and energy to the revivification of the same culture.

Philip Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, p.488.

In this way history has repeatedly proved the truth of the verses quoted above. But when it was revealed events had not proved the truth of God's statement.

History was still clothed in the veil of the future. At that time there was nothing more difficult than sacrificing one's life and property for the sake of communicating the faith. Just as it is easy to see past history, so it is difficult to see future history. The Muslims in the time of the Prophet achieved this most difficult task. They saw events before they happened, and did exactly what was required of them. In comparison the task before us is an easy one. We only have to repeat in our lives a principle that history has already proven to be true. But whereas our predecessors succeeded in their most difficult trial, we have failed in our easy one.

Fearing God with regard to the oppressors

The seventy idolaters who were captured in the Battle of Badr were brought to Medina. Suhail Ibn Amr was one of them. The Prophet was told that Suhail was a fiery speaker, and kept on making speeches against him. "Why not pluck his teeth out?" it was suggested. "If I break his teeth," the Prophet replied, "then God will break mine, although I am a prophet." The Prophet divided the prisoners up into various homes of the companions, and told all concerned to treat them well. Abu Aziz, who was one of the prisoners, says that the Ansari household in which he was kept would give him bread morning and evening, and themselves make do with dates. The chief of the Yamama tribe, Thumama Ibn Uthal was taken prisoner. For the duration of his captivity, he was provided with excellent food and milk, under the Prophet's instructions, stones crash down the mountainside in symbolic confirmation of the correctness of this way. The Quran exhorts man to obey God's commandments, and everything in the universe, by fully following the law of nature, proclaims that no other path is possible in this world. The Quran says that one should build for oneself without causing harm to others, and the sun, moon and all heavenly bodies, revolving in their orbits, show how proper this demand is. The Quran says that after this world another world is coming in which man will reap the consequences of his deeds: and the universe, with its ultimate meaningfulness, testifies that life cannot end with the present world; another world must come in which truth and falsehood are exposed for what they are.

The Islamic Centre, Delhi, was inaugurated in 1970. It has purely constructive aims. It seeks to present Islam to the world as the science of life; it wishes man to observe the religion of realism that the whole universe observes. In a nutshell, we want to make science journalism, and journalism science.

He Could Not Stand Being Criticized

The American poet Ezra Pound (1885-1972), first met Rabindernath Tagore in London on the 30th June 1912. He was very impressed with Tagore's talent. When an English translation of the Bengali poet's book of verse *Gitanjali*, was published. Pound wrote that Tagore's works had all the grandeur of Dante. He even said that Tagore is "greater than anyone of us".

Ezra Pound wrote these words on Tagore in 'the American magazine *Fortnightly Review* in March 1913. Just one month later, on April 22, 1913, he wrote a letter to the editor of *Poetry* magazine, in which he called Tagore "superfluous". His works are just a repetition of old tales, Pound wrote, and whatever literary relish there was in Bengali original had also been done away with in the English translation.

How did this change come about in Ezra Pound's opinion of Tagore? The reason for it was that Pound had, with the help of Kali Mohun Ghosh, translated the poetry of Kabir into English. Before being published in book-form, this translation had been serialized in a magazine. Tagore had seen it, and found it to be seriously defective. He strongly criticized the literary standard of the translation. This criticism infuriated Pound, and instead of the lavish admirations with which he had previously extolled Tagore, he started to abuse him. (*Times of India*; March 8, 1979)

The thing that most people hate above all is criticism of themselves. The reason for this is that by and large people's worship is centred on their own beings, and by nature man cannot tolerate criticism of the object that he worships.

One person's praise of another is itself usually a form of self praise. When a political leader stands on the rostrum, and treats his packed audience to a speech full of generous words then he is in fact repaying them for adding to his prestige by coming to listen to him. When someone sings an eulogy to one who is not his rival, it is really just a harmless way of publicizing his own open-heartedness and courtesy. When one writer writes in flowery terms of another, then he is either thanking him indirectly for some previous laudatory piece, or he is saying to him:

"Give me the same publicity as I have given you". Sometimes one expresses admiration in order to repair one's image, damaged by some previous criticism. True admiration is that which is expressed out of true benevolence towards one's fellow. But this is the very thing that is found least in the world. To say a truly well-meaning word to another is an act of such enormous generosity that few indeed are fortunate enough to perform it.

6 September 1984

Spiritual states can be brought about only if conditions are conducive

The Prophet was visited by an angel. "Mohammad," he said, "the Lord greets you. He says that, if you wish, he will turn the rocky terrain of Mecca into gold." The Prophet lifted up his eyes to heaven. "Lord," he said. "Please, no. I prefer to be full one day and hungry the next. When I go hungry, I humble myself before you and seek your help, and when I eat my fill, I give thanks to you and praise you."

6 September 1984

Prosperity is a more severe test

The Prophet once said: "I fear more for you the test 'of prosperity than the test of adversity, for when you were afflicted by adversity, you were patient; but if the world becomes green and pleasant, you will fall a prey to temptation." The following words were also spoken by the Prophet: "You will be given so much worldly abundance that this is what will make you go astray after me."

Victory of Truth

Towards the end of the 19th century, when the British ruled in India, a mosque was being constructed in Kandhla – a village in U.P., northern India. A dispute started between local Hindus and Muslims concerning the land next to the mosque. The Muslims claimed that it belonged to the mosque and wished to include it in the new construction. But the Hindus insisted that it was the site of an ancient temple. The dispute grew and eventually the case was taken to the court, where it took several years to reach a decision.

The magistrate was an Englishman. He was unable to make a decision on the basis of the inconclusive evidence that was brought before him. Eventually he spoke to the Hindus and the Muslims separately. He asked the Muslims if they knew any Hindu who would be able to testify that the land belonged to the mosque; if they did, he said, he would settle the issue on the basis of his evidence. The Muslims, however, were unable to give the name of any such Hindu. "This is a religious matter", they said "we cannot expect any Hindu to be impartial in such an affair. There is no Hindu we know who would speak the truth, and admit that the land belongs to the mosque."

The magistrate then called the Hindus, and asked them if they could suggest the name of a Muslim who would verify their claim that the land had been the site of a temple. If they could tell him of such a Muslim, he said, he would settle the case on the basis of his evidence, and give the land to the Hindus. The Hindus consulted among themselves. Then they reported back to the magistrate. "This has become a matter of sectarian pride," they said. "For this reason it will be difficult to find a Muslim who admits that the land belongs to our temple. But there is one holy man in our village. We do not expect him to tell a lie.

The Muslim's name that the Hindus gave was Maulana Mahmud Bakhsh, the father of Maulana Muzaffar Hussain Kandhelvi. The magistrate was at this time based near Kandhla, in a village called Ailum. He immediately summoned Maulana Mahmud Bakhsh to the court to give evidence in this case.

Maulana Mahmud Bakhsh came to the magistrate's court. A large number of Hindus and Muslims had gathered outside the court. Everyone was waiting with mixed feelings for the decision. The magistrate spoke in a loud voice. "Maulana Mahmud Bakhsh," he said, "Can you tell me whether the disputed land belongs to the Hindus or the Muslims?" "The truth of the matter is that the land belongs to the Hindus," Maulana Mahmud Bakhsh replied. "The Muslims' claim is false." The case was decided on the basis of this evidence and the Hindus got their land. The plot can still be seen to the south-east of the congregational mosque in Kandhla. Construction of a temple commenced there immediately after the magistrate's decision, and it still stands there.

The Muslims were a sullen and dispirited lot as they returned from the court room. Many of them accused the Maulana of disgracing them in front of others. Little did they know that, though the judicial decision had been made, another ethical one was still to be taken. The Hindus were extremely impressed by the Maulana's honesty and unprejudiced adherence to truth. They began to see, in his truthfulness, the truthfulness of the religion which had given him the strength to stick to justice in such a delicate" sectarian matter. As a result several families in Kandhla accepted Islam at the hand of Maulana Mahmud Bakhsh. One of these families was still living in Kandhla at the time of the partition of India in 1947.

The Muslims act on the basis of national prejudices in their dealings with non-Muslims, they only succeed in alienating the other party. But when they act on the basis of truth, God blesses their efforts to such a degree that even their failures turn into successes; even their worldly defeats become eternal triumphs; even their personal setbacks are put to the advantage of their faith.

8 September 1984

Preaching peace, but failing to practice it

The Green party of West Germany is perhaps the most famous and influential peace party in Western Europe. The party is stringently opposed to the nuclear arms race, and has actively resisted the stationing of American missiles in Germany. In the 1983 general election, the Greens won over 5% of the national vote and are now represented in the Bundestag. One of the party's most prestigious representatives in parliament was Mr. Gert Bastian, a former general in the Bundeswehr. Recently he resigned from the parliamentary party of the Greens. The reason given (*Guardian Weekly*, February 26, 1984) was that "he could no longer tolerate infighting ... and organizational chaos of the party in the Bundestag."

Labour of a Lifetime

Helen Hooven Santmyer is now 88 years old, crippled and half-blind. She also suffers from emphysema. Because of her infirmity, she resides permanently in a nursing-home in Xenia, Ohio, U.S.A.

Over fifty years ago, when Helen Hooven Santmyer was working as a reference librarian, she started to write a book. At first she worked on it in her spare time. Then, when ill-health forced her to retire, she continued her work in the nursing-home where she now lives.

She wrote the whole book out herself, in longhand, on a ledger. In 1982, her work completed, she presented it to the Ohio State University Press for publication. The final manuscript filled 11 boxes. A handful of copies were printed, but the book met with no initial success. It seemed as if Helen Hooven Santmyer's name would vanish without trace from the American literary scene.

But at least one person who bought the book read it and liked it. He was praising it in an Ohio library one day when the librarian overheard his conversation. The word was passed on to a producer, then an agent, then the American Book-Club. Each party found the book entrancing and worthy of a greater audience.

Finally Helen Hooven Santmyer's book, entitled "*...And Ladies of the Club*", was nominated for the Book-Club Award in January 1984. It won the Award, and with it a sum of over 1 million dollars.

Helen Hooven Santmyer did not seek fame or wealth from her novel. Its topic – the story of two Ohio families in the period between the American Civil War and the great depression of the early 1930's is obviously not aimed at the commercial market. The author believed that Sinclair Lewis had painted a false portrait of the American dream in his novel of the 1920's, "Main Street". She wanted to correct that picture. As Haynes Johnson writes in the Washington Post:

The author was clearly not in the market for big bucks. She obviously was motivated by saying something in which she believed. The bare account of how she produced the work over the year, in her spare time, in sickness and in health, in itself provides an astonishing testament of her perseverance.

(*Guardian Weekly*, January 29, 1984)

Strong belief in something makes one rise above one's worldly situation. It makes one concentrate on one's end in life. No matter what hindrances and obstacles lie in one's path, one shoulders on until one reaches one's final destination.

The conviction that spurs a true believer on is faith in the life to come. He bears all forms of hardship, suffering and adversity in this world. He realizes that this ephemeral world is for the trial of man; in the

next eternal world of God he will be rewarded for his efforts. As Helen Hooven Santmyer laboured for over half a century in the compilation of her book, bearing all forms of adversity in her determination to attain her goal in life, so the believer labours all his life for the attainment of reward in the hereafter. And, as Helen Hooven Santmyer's sustained effort bore her due reward in this world, so the believer's sustained effort will bear him due reward in the next world: he will be made to enter a paradise of eternal repose and bliss.

10 September 1984

Reply without Reaction

Mr. J. Krishnamurti, 90, is a well-known Indian thinker. When he is on a public stage, he folds his hands and says, "Sir, I am a nobody," or, "Sir, I am just a passer-by." Are we all nothing in reality? His answer is, "Yes, when you are as nothing, you are everything."

Islamic thinkers disapprove of thoughts of this kind for they lead to scepticism or monism, and both are just a philosophical license for irresponsibility and monism. Yet there is an example from Krishnamurti's life which can be quoted here with great pertinence.

Mr. J. Krishnamurti is fortunate enough to find a large audience at every speech he makes. Thousands attend his talks year after year, but he feels unhappy at their failure to move along with him. At the end of his discussions in Madras in February 1984, he asked the audience: "Will you change, sirs?" and declared, "You'll all go back and continue doing what you have been doing. " For more than 50 years he has been traveling round the West and India, but has still not relaxed his efforts to make people see what he thinks ought to be seen.

Once a man in the audience asked him angrily, "Year after year you say that we are not going along with you; then why do you keep talking to us?" Mr. Krishnamurti politely replied, "Sir, have you ever asked a rose why it blooms?"

When you are provoked by a remark of your critic, all you do is react. But when you resist provocation, you are able to give an answer which will render your critic speechless.

Capability and Alertness

Raja Mohinder Pratap (1886-1979) was one of those Indians who went to Russia and met Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924). He was one of a delegation of freedom-fighters who met the Russian leader in 1919. He tells how, when he entered the room of the first ruler of communist Russia, Lenin rose to his feet, and went himself to fetch a small armchair from the corner of the room. Raja Mohinder Pratap took his seat on the armchair and Lenin sat next to him on a sofa. The revolutionary leader's first sentence was:

"In which language should I speak: English, German, French or Russian?"

It was finally settled that the conversation would be conducted in English. Raja Mohinder Pratap offered Lenin a copy of his book '*The Religion of Love*'. "I have read this book," Lenin said, as soon as he took hold of it. Raja Mohinder Pratap was astonished. Where on earth could Lenin have obtained the book? The previous evening, Lenin explained, when Raja Mohinder Pratap had met his secretary to fix the time of appointment, he had given the secretary a copy of the book. "I took it from him and read it during the night, in order to familiarize myself with the thought of the person I was going to meet the next day."

Lenin was the founder of modern Russia. He was an extraordinarily gifted man. Two of his qualities – capability and alertness – are illustrated in the above incident. He had studied so assiduously that he knew four different languages and was able to converse fluently in each one of them. Then so alert and on-the-ball was he that – despite his enormous preoccupation with affairs of state – he read the book of an unknown Indian at night, just so that he could have some prior knowledge of that person's thought when he met him the next day. Lenin made every effort to cultivate this natural talent; he made the most of the opportunities that were provided him; that was how he rose to the ranks of triumphant world leaders.

These two qualities – capability and alertness – are required for any kind of work. They are indispensable for the service of the Islamic cause, just as they are essential to one working in some other, secular field.

Firstly one must be fully equipped with contemporary knowledge, and secondly one must show oneself to be absolutely prepared in whatever one does. Lenin showed how one, equipped with these qualities, can achieve success in the secular field. If people who show capability and alertness of this nature apply themselves to the service of the Islamic cause, then they too will achieve the desired goal.

Prayer

Man has been advised in the Quran to be steadfast in his prayer, for prayer fends away indecency and evil. When the Prophet of Islam was asked about this verse he said:

If a person's prayer does not fend away indecency and evil then his prayer is not really prayer at all.

What is prayer? It is to remember the fact that man is living before a God who – though man cannot see Him – can see man. Whoever leaves the mosque with this fact firmly embedded in his mind cannot live forgetful of God. In prayer man testifies to the fact that God is the greatest of all beings. If one is truthful in one's testimony, then one will not claim greatness for oneself when one has finished praying. Whatever one recites in prayer is a covenant before God that one will keep his commandments; then how is it possible that one should leave the mosque and treat people with arrogance and contumacy? The actions of prayer are a manifestation of the fact that one's heart is full of fear and love for God. How can one claim to be full of fear and love for God in the mosque, and then live as if one knows neither fear or love for Him when one goes outside?

If one prays in the true spirit of prayer, then one's prayer will surely fend away indecency and evil. But if one's prayer is devoid of spirit, then it will be no more than a perfunctory action which has no connection with one's real life. It will be prayer in form, but not in reality: for it will not fend away indecency and evil.

It is as if one were to say: a son who stays lying down while he sees his father standing does not respect his father; a brother who sees his sister hungry and does not give her something to eat is not really a brother at all; the friendship of a person who hears of his friend's death and does not stop laughing is not really friendship at all.

13-15 September 1984

Addressing the Press

Our meeting today is not a press conference in the normal sense of the term. Press conferences usually discuss public issues and, as you know, we have no such issue before us. This is really a sort of journalistic meeting.

As part of the Islamic Centre's programme for constructive work, we seek to communicate our message to every section of the community. So our colleagues thought it would be a good idea for it to be communicated to our friends of the press as well. For the press is, in our day and age, like the public's eye, with which they see; it is like the public's mind with which they think.

Although journalism is not very advanced in our country, still – in theory at least – the press is the greatest power in the modern age. In western countries the press has become an independent force, parallel to governments. If the press in these countries turns against a president or prime minister, then its opposition cannot be ignored. The political eclipse of Richard Nixon in 1973 provides us with example of the power of the press in western countries.

But, if you will permit me, I would like to say that the power of the press has not yet been channeled in the right direction. Man today holds this power in his grasp, but as yet it has not been effectively implemented for the improvement of the mankind. I will clarify this point with one example:

Imagine that the plane I came from Delhi on belonged to Israel or America, and I hijacked it and made it land in Hyderabad. Then, if any press conference was announced, it would be much bigger one than that which has now come together. Correspondents of foreign newspapers would have rushed from Delhi to Hyderabad so that they could cover it; despite the fact that, we all know, there is nothing more futile than hijacking an aeroplane. But this is what journalism in our day is all about. That which is totally unimportant "in the world of reality assumes the highest importance in the world of journalism. Why? Simply because it contains what in journalistic jargon is called news value.

A Press Conference given by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, President of the Islamic Centre, Delhi, in Hyderabad, South India, on November 12, 1982.

During a recent journey I stopped over for a while in the Ugandan airport of Antebbe. On seeing it, I recalled that this was the place where the Israeli airliner, hijacked by Palestinians in 1976, landed. For a few days this story remained on the front page of newspapers; but you all know the price that the Palestinians had to pay for this afterwards.

From this one can tell how modern journalism makes a thing, which in real terms is absolutely worthless, appear as if it is of the greatest worth.

What we ask of the press is that it should attach importance to real value, not to news value. Attaching importance to real value makes one realistic, and realism is the source of all human virtues. Attaching importance to news value, on the other hand, leads to insincerity, and insincerity is, without doubt, the cause of all human evils.

The press can play an important role in the sincere and constructive society that Islam seeks to create. But at present it is proceeding in a direction quite contrary to this aim. Islam seeks to train people to attach importance to realities, and in modern journalism perfection has become to spotlight what is most unreal.

While on a foreign trip, I once met a gentleman from Canada. He asked me the meaning of Islam. "Islam means realism," I replied. In actual fact, Islam is the science of life, and this science is founded on the principle that one should be realist in this world; in every matter one should adopt a realistic attitude which is the secret to every success in life, and lack of realism is the prime cause of all failure.

In the present age there are two departments which are particularly important in fashioning the shape of life. These two departments are science and journalism. Science is connected more to the physical world and journalism to the human world; science studies events in the universe, and journalism deals with the events in the world of man. But the strange thing is that these two departments are at severe odds with one another.

Science is founded fully on realistic principles; it proceeds in compliance with the reality that there is a world outside us that rests solidly on firm laws. Water, for instance, has a law of its own; so does land, and so does the atmosphere. Ships come into being by virtue of conformance with the laws of water; motor cars result from conformance with the laws of land; aeroplane develop from the conformance with laws of atmosphere. This complete conformance with the outside world is what every triumph of science basically is.

But in journalism – or the world of man – the very opposite is the case. One chapter of a book I read on journalism showed the principles that a journalist observes' when compiling a story. These principles have been illustrated by a special term in journalism: inverted pyramid. For instance, a building, 21-storeys in height, is being constructed in town. When a journalist makes a story out of this, his first sentence will be: '21-storey building constructed'. Clearly, the 21st storey was the last thing to be built. First the plan was laid; then the ground was prepared; then the foundations were dug, and construction started from the base, until finally the top storey was erected. But, in the news story, it is the twenty-first storey that comes first.

One can say that if science attaches importance to real value, then journalism attaches importance to news value. This contradiction in the two major departments of life has caused chaos on earth. The principles which we adopt in science with successful results, we fail to adopt in the rest of our lives; there, we put the contrary principles into practice. The result of this contradiction is that the success which we have obtained in science, we have not been able to obtain in ordinary life. We can, by scientific

means, construct a superbly planned town, but in this same town we cannot live superbly planned lives. Science has enabled us to manufacture machines which work with technical perfection, but we cannot make man fulfill his duty with the same technical perfection.

The thing which is flashed most in the newspapers is that which has the most news value. The most successful press conference is one which is convened on some major public issue. We would like this situation be changed. We would like to see the same realistic posture that is adopted in the world of physics, adopted in the world of man also.

Islam holds that Quran is God's light to man, guiding him on the path to this life of realism. The summary of its teachings is that man should adopt the religion that the whole universe has adopted:

Are they seeking a religion other than God's, when every soul in heaven and earth has submitted to Him, willingly or by compulsion?

Al-Imran, 3: 83.

The relation between the Quran and the universe is the same as that between theory and demonstration in science. The Quran is the theory of what the universe follows on a practical level.

The Quran tells us of the existence of God, and the universe, with its superb design, confirms the truth of this. The Quran tells man to bow before the Lord, and trees cast their shadow on the ground and

A Target for Constructive Talent

Swami Vivekanand (1863-1902) had undertaken long journeys in search of truth before he reached the shores of Ras Kumari. Spotting a small island one furlong off the coast, he swam out to it, and there engaged himself in meditation. After some time he returned to the shore, and devoted himself to propagation of Hinduism.

A large centre has now been established on this island at a cost of 2 crore rupees (20 million). The construction, begun after independence, was completed in 1970. The main aim of the centre is “man-making”. When it made an appeal for recruitment of workers, dozens of highly-educated men and women, as well as hundreds of young volunteers, responded to the call, and dedicated their lives to continuing Vivekanand’s mission. They became life workers for this cause.

Dr. H.R. Nigendar is one of these dedicated volunteers. Previously, he held a high position in Space Flight Centre in America, but is now content with the modest life that the centre has to offer him. He does not feel out of place there. “A scientist’s job,” he said, “is to search for truth, and my search is continuing. Earlier it was in mechanical engineering, now it is in human engineering.”

At present, the Vivekanand Centre is concentrating its work in four particular fields – education, rural development, Yoga research, and the publication of literature. Hundreds of people have abandoned a comfortable life and high positions to engage in the quiet, constructive work that the Centre is conducting in various states around the country. In the words of Dr Nigendar, “It is a rich life indeed – rich in job satisfaction.”

A living nation alone can produce highly-talented individuals who are ready to dedicate their lives to a noble cause, whose intellectual prowess makes them alive to lofty ideals. If people of high intelligence are not ready to dedicate their lives to high ideals, but engage instead in base pursuits, then all one can say is that such a nation has lost all vision and vitality.

Regardless of your age it’s not too late to make your life more Interesting, Get over the idea that you’re ever too old to go back to school. It’s never too late to add another skill to those you now possess.

The Secret of Success

On April 12th, 1983, an Indian soldier, Barber Kailash Chand, 29, of the 10 Para Commandos, was returning by train to Jodhpur with some other jawans from Poona, where they had just completed their training. .

The 5 Down Ahmedabad-Agra Fort Express in which they were traveling was moving at full speed between Jawali and Somesar stations. Barber Kailash Chand was standing near a window and enjoying the breeze when suddenly he saw a jawan of the Ordnance Corps falling out of the open door of the next compartment. Momentarily stunned, Kailash Chand still lost no time in pulling the chain to bring the train to a halt; but as luck would have it the system was inoperative: the train continued to speed along.

Kailash Chand then shouted for the guard who was in the next compartment. Unable to attract his attention because of the din of the fast-moving train, Kailash Chand suddenly decided that something else would have to be done. With utter disregard for his own safety, he rushed out of the compartment and, grasping the safety bars of the train, inched his way towards the guards van. With flailing legs, the paratrooper finally managed to reach the compartment after about ten agonizing minutes. The guard brought the train to a halt, but it was for the soldier to convince the engine driver that he should reverse the train six kilometres to pick up the wounded soldier who had fallen out of the door. The loco-driver pointed out that he could not take the train back without official orders: The jawan insisted that the soldier would have to be picked up first and the consequences, if any, faced later. As a result, the soldier, who was seriously injured and bleeding, was picked up and rushed to hospital. His life had been saved.

Paratrooper Barber Kailash Chand was later awarded a medal for bravery, the "Vishisht Sewa", by the Government of India. Narrating the sequence of events, he said that while inching his way towards the guard's van, he had been thinking only of the soldier who had fallen out of the train; he had not thought about his own safety. All he wanted to do was to stop the train somehow, so that the soldier could be saved.

In order to save the injured soldier, Barber Kailash Chand had to forget himself. After that nothing could stand in his way. Dedication to a cause makes one rise above thoughts of oneself. One is then able to surmount any obstacle. Obstacles are only obstacles for those who seek to save themselves; they present no hindrance for those who have no thoughts of personal safety.

So it is with any purpose in life. To succeed, one must do what Kailash Chand did with such success: one must lose oneself, for only then will one be able to find one's true self. Self-fulfillment does not lie in making oneself secure in life, though that is where most people seek it; it lies in putting aside all thoughts of one's own safety, and relentlessly pursuing one's goal.

We are in God's Country

An American lady went on a tour of Russia. There, she saw pictures of the Chairman of the Communist party hanging everywhere she went. She took offence of this, and gave vent to her feelings in the presence of some Russians. Her companion whispered in her ear: "Madam, you are in Russia now, not America."

One can live as one likes in one's own country, but when one goes to a foreign country one has to abide by its laws. If one does not do so, then one will be considered an offender.

The same is true, in a broader sense, of this world. Man has been born into a world which he himself did not create. The world in which man lives is entirely of God's making. Man, then, is not in his own country: he is living in the country of God.

This being the case, the only way that man can prosper is by understanding God's scheme, and living in the world according to that scheme. If he contradicts the scheme of God then he will be considered as a rebel. He will be liable for punishment in the sight of God, and stands to be deprived for all time of the blessings of the Lord.

The question is: how should man live in the world in order to conform with the will of God? It was to provide an answer to this question that God raised up His prophets. The prophets showed man, plainly and in terms that he could understand, exactly what the Lord requires of him; they defined the scheme of God with which man should comply.

The Quran is an authentic collection of this prophetic guidance. Whoever wishes to be counted among God's faithful servants, and granted a share in His eternal blessings, must read the Quran and be guided by it in his life.

Whoever does not do this will meet a similar – though more severe fate – than that of Americophiles in Russia or Russophiles in America.

Translated by Wali Mohd Ansari

Part I, Chapter III

Mohammad: The Prophet of Revolution**Exemplary conduct**

The Prophet of Islam, Mohammad (may peace be upon him)' was born in Arabia on 22 April 571AD, and died on 8 June 632AD. He was a very handsome and powerfully built man. His childhood gave indications of the sublime and dynamic personality that was to emerge. As he grew up, the grandeur, of his personality used to overawe anyone beholding him, but he was so soft-spoken and of such genial disposition that anyone coming into close contact with him would learn to love him. A perfectly balanced personality – tolerant, truthful, perspicacious and magnanimous – he presented the noblest example of human greatness. Daud Ibn Husain says that it was commonly said about him that as he grew older, he became known as the most chivalrous among his people, neighbourly, tolerant and forbearing, truthful and trustworthy. He would stay aloof from all quarrels and quibbles, from foul utterances, abuse and invective. People left their valuables in his custody, for they knew that he would never betray them. His unimpeachable trustworthiness won for him the title of "Al-Amin", a faithful custodian, an unfailing trustee.

When he married at the age of twenty-five, his uncle Abu Talib performed the marriage service. "There is no one to compare with my nephew, Mohammad Ibn Abdullah," he said. "He outshines everyone in nobility, gentility, eminence and wisdom. By God, he has a great future and will reach a very high station." Abu Talib did not utter these words in the sense in which later events proved them to be true. He meant them in a worldly sense. Nature had endowed his nephew with a magnetic and versatile personality. His people would surely appreciate his qualities, and raise him to a high station. Abu Talib envisaged a future to worldly success and accomplishment of his nephew; this was the "great future" which he referred to in his sermon.

Without doubt the Prophet had every opportunity for worldly advance. His virtues guaranteed his success in life. He was born into a noble family of Mecca. True, he had inherited just one camel and one servant from his father, but his inborn high qualities had impressed the richest woman in Mecca. Her name was Khadija, a forty-year-old widow belonging to a family of merchants. When the Prophet was twenty-five, she offered herself to him in marriage. Not only did marriage with Khadija provide the Prophet with wealth and property; it threw open to him a vast field of business in Arabia and beyond. The Prophet had every opportunity, then, of leading a successful and comfortable life. But he forsook all these things and chose something quite different for himself. Quite intentionally, he took a road that could only lead to worldly ruin. Before his marriage, the Prophet had earned his living in different ways. Now he relinquished all that, and dedicated himself to his lifelong vocation – the pursuit of truth. He

used to sit for hours and ponder over the mysteries of creation. Instead of socializing and trying to gain a position for himself among the nobles of Mecca, he would wander in the hills and vales of the desert. Often he used to retire to the loneliness of a cave in Mount Hira – three miles from Mecca – and stay there until his meagre supply of food and water was exhausted. He would return home to replenish his supplies, and then go back to the solitude of nature for prayer and meditation. He would beseech the Maker of the heavens and the earth for answers to the questions surging in his mind. What is man's true role in life? What does Lord require of us, as His servants? When does man come and whether will he go after death? Unable to find answers to these questions in the centres of human activity, he betook himself to the stillness of the desert; perhaps, there, the answer would be forthcoming.

It was no small matter that a young man should be taking up this course in the prime of his life. He was renouncing worldly happiness and choosing a way fraught with difficulties and sorrow. He had all conceivable means and opportunities for a comfortable life, but his turbulent soul did not find satisfaction in them. He attached no value to them and could not rest content until he had unraveled the mysteries of life. He sought to delve beyond external appearances, and seek out the reality of life. Worldly gain and loss, comfort and distress, did not concern him; what mattered to him was the all-important question of truth and falsehood.

This phase of the Prophet's life has been described in these words in the Quran:

“Did He not find you wandering and guide you?”
(93:7)

The word used in this verse for “wandering” (“dhalan”) can also be used to describe a tree standing alone in an empty desert. The Prophet, then, was like a lone tree standing amidst the vast wilderness of ignorance that was Arabia of the time. The idea of consolidating his position in this society was abhorrent to him. He sought the truth, and nothing less than the truth, could satisfy his soul. His quest had reached a point when life had become an unbearable burden. The Quran looks back on that time and describes it in these words.

“Have We not lifted up and expanded your heart and relieved you of the burden which
weighed down your back?”
(94:1)

God, indeed, relieved him of his burden. He turned in mercy to His Prophet, illuminating his path and guiding him on his journey. On February 12, 610AD, the Prophet was sitting alone in his cave. The angel of the Lord appeared before him in human form and taught him the words which appear at the beginning of the ninety-six chapter of the Quran. The Prophet's quest had finally been rewarded. His restless soul had joined; in communion with the Lord. Not only did God grant him guidance; He also chose Mohammad as His Prophet and special envoy to the world. The mission of the Prophet extended over the next twenty-three years. During this period the entire content of the Quran – the final divine scripture – was revealed to him.

The Prophet of Islam discovered Truth in the fortieth year of his arduous life. It was an attainment that was not to usher in ease and comfort, for this Truth was that man stood face to face with an Almighty God. It was discovery of his own helplessness before the might of God, of his own nothingness before the supernatural magnitude of the Almighty. With this discovery it became clear that God's faithful servant had nothing but responsibilities in this world; he had no rights.

The meaning that life took on for the Prophet after the Truth came to him can be ascertained from these words:

Nine things the Lord has commanded me.
Fear of God in private and in public;
Justness, whether in anger or in calmness;
Moderation in both poverty and affluence;
That I should join hands with those who break away from me;
and give to those who deprive me;
and forgive those who wrong me;
and that my silence should be meditation;
and my words remembrance of God;
and my vision keen observation.

Razin

These were not just glib words; they were a reflection of the Prophet's very life. Poignant and wondrously effective words of this nature could not emanate from an empty soul; they themselves indicate the status of the speaker; they are an outpouring of his inner being, and unquenchable spirit revealed in verbal form.

Even before the dawn of his prophethood, the Prophet's life had followed the same pattern. The motivation, however, had been subconscious; now it came on to the level of consciousness. Actions which had previously been based on instinctive impulses now became the well-conceived results of profound thinking. This is the state of one who reduces material needs to a minimum; whose life assumes a different pattern from that of others; who in body lives in this world, but in spirit dwells on another plane.

The Prophet once said:

A discerning person should have some special moments:
a moment of communion with God;
a moment of self-examination;
a moment of reflection over the mysteries of creation;
and a moment which he puts aside for eating and drinking.

(Ibn Hibban)

In other words, this is how God's faithful servant passes the day. Sometimes the yearning of his soul brings him so close to God that he finds something in communion with the Lord. Sometimes fear of the day when he will be brought before the Lord for reckoning makes him reckon with himself. Sometimes he is so overawed by the marvels of God's creation that he starts seeing the splendours of the Creator reflected therein. Thus he spends his time encountering the Lord, his own self, and the world around him, also finding some time to cater for his physical needs.

These words are not a description of some remote being; they are a reflection of the Prophet's own personality, a flash from the light of faith that illuminated his own heart. These "moments" were a part and parcel of the Prophet's life. One who has not experienced these states can never describe them in such a lofty manner. The soul from which these words emanated was itself in the state that they describe; through words that state of spiritual perfection was communicated to others.

Before he received the word of God, this world – with all its shortcomings and limitations – appeared meaningless to the Prophet. But now that God had revealed to him that besides this world there was another perfect and eternal world, which was the real abode of man, life and the universe took on new meaning. He now found a level on which his soul could subsist, a life in which he could involve himself, heart and soul. The Prophet now found a real world into which he could put his heart and soul, a target for all his hopes and aspirations, a goal for all his life's endeavours.

This is what is meant by the world being a planting-ground for the hereafter. One who realizes this fact lives a life oriented towards the hereafter – a life in which all efforts are aimed at achieving success in the next, eternal world; a life in which real value is attached – not to this ephemeral world – but to the life beyond death. One becomes aware that this world is not the final destination; it is only a road towards the destination, a starting-point of preparation for the future life. Just as every action of a person of the world is performed with worldly interests in mind, so every action of God's faithful servant is focused on the hereafter. His reactions to every situation in life reflect this attitude of looking at every matter in perspective of the life after death, and of how it will affect his interests in the next world. Whether it be an occasion of happiness or sorrow, success or failure, domination or depression, praise or condemnation, love or anger – in every state he is guided by thoughts of hereafter, until finally these thoughts become a part of his unconscious mind. He does not cease to be a mortal, but his mind comes to function only on matters related to the world of immortality, making him almost forget his interest in worldly matters.

This reality is discovered not merely on an intellectual level. When it takes root, it transforms one completely, and raises one's level of existence. The Prophet of Islam provides us with a superlative example of this way of life. The greatest lesson furnished by his life is that, unless one changes one's plane of existence, one cannot change one's plane of actions.

When the Prophet Mohammad discovered the reality of the world hereafter it came to dominate his whole life. He himself became most desirous of the heaven of which he gave tidings to others, and he

himself was most fearful of the hell of which he warned others. Deep concern for the life to come was always welling up inside him. Sometimes it would surge to his lips in the form of supplication, and sometimes in the form of heartfelt contrition. He lived on a completely different plane from ordinary human beings. This is illustrated by many incidents, of which a few are mentioned here.

Once the Prophet was at home with Umm Salma. He called maid-servant, who took some time in coming. Seeing signs of anger on the Prophet's face, Umm Salma went to the window and looked outside. She saw the maid playing. The Prophet had a twig in his hand. "If it wasn't for the fear of the retribution on the Day of Judgement," he told the maid. "then I would have hit you with this twig." Even this mildest of punishments was to be eschewed.

The men taken prisoner in the Battle of Badr were the Prophet's bitterest enemies, but still his treatment of them was impeccable. One of these prisoners was a man by the name of Suhail Ibn Amr. A fiery speaker, he used to denounce the Prophet virulently in public to incite people against him and his mission. Umer suggested that two of his lower teeth be pulled out to dampen his oratorical zeal. The Prophet was shocked by Umer's suggestion. "God would disfigure me for this on the Day of Judgement, even though I am His Messenger," he said to Umer.